

THE ABORIGINES OF THE SOVIET FAR EAST

Soviet officials failed to understand that the reindeer plays a vital part in the life of the Northern tribesmen, and that it is not a mere subsidiary to their economy as is the cow of the Russian peasants. According to the tribal customs of the Koryaks and Chukchi it is a sin to sell a living reindeer. The Soviet administrators denounced this custom as sabotage, and imposed on the reindeer-breeders not only compulsory sales, but also the confiscation measures which accompany collectivization. The setting up of collective farms and state farms in the native territories of the Arctic regions of the Soviet Far East, led in the 'thirties' to the unleashing of a violent class struggle which, in turn, resulted in a drastic drop in the number of reindeer. Not only did the rich reindeer breeders engage in large scale 'predatory slaughter' of the animals, but they also hampered the collectivization and nationalization measures in other ways. To escape 'de-kulakization', they split their large herds into smaller ones, and distributed them among their shepherds. Moreover pastureland was wilfully destroyed, apparently on a considerable scale.

Loss of reindeer occurred not only in the private but also in the State-controlled sector. The new State farms which were to introduce higher forms of reindeer breeding were, in reality, far more inefficient than the individual reindeer breeding nomad. In the Far East the State reindeer farms lost one-third of their herds within a single year - a catastrophe which could not be attributed entirely to the infiltration of class-alien elements.

Official Soviet statistics about the development of Soviet Russia's reindeer population demonstrate convincingly what damage the collectivization measures caused. In the first years of the communist régime when state interference with the Far Northern economy was slight there was a clear upward trend. The number of reindeer in the entire Soviet Union increased from 1,765,000 in 1923 to 2,193,000 in 1926-27 and to 2,700,000 in 1931. The year 1931 was the turning point. In 1932 the stock fell to 2,333,000, in 1933 to 2,030,000 and in 1934 it was as low as 1,889,000. These figures which apply to Soviet Russia as a whole do not fully reveal the catastrophic consequences of communist reindeer policy in the Far East. In the Koryak National Area, for instance, where full collectivization had been planned for 1933, the number of reindeer decreased from 264,000 in 1926 to 173,000 in 1932 and 127,000 in 1934.¹³

Soviet statistical evidence about Russia's reindeer population after 1934 is contradictory. Figures produced by various official Soviet sources show a large margin of difference. The *Small Soviet Encyclopedia* says that on January 1st, 1938, the number of reindeer was 1,766,000.¹³ This would mean that the situation was then even worse than in 1933. On the other hand, a Soviet standard work on Russian reindeer-breeding published in the post-war period claims that the number of reindeer in 1938 was 28 per cent higher than in 1933. But even this book which

Here in 1950 a Melioration Machine Station was erected, the first in the Krai, which is to be followed by seven others. Of great significance is the development of agriculture on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Before World War I, according to Soviet figures, the area under cultivation was 4 hectares; in 1938 it was 2, 778 hectares. Since then it has further increased. In 1950 there were more than 10 kolkhoz. In 1952 a scientific expedition was sent out from Khabarovsk to Kamchatka to investigate and to prepare for the gaining of additional land for agriculture. In the same year two Melioration Machine Stations were erected, which in the next three years made nearly 40, 000 hectares of swamp and taiga country available for agriculture. From Sakhalin, too, successes in the winning of new land were reported. Prominent is the fact that also the native population (Gilyak in the "Chir Unvd" Kolkhoz, i. e., "New Life Kolkhoz") has been used with success in agriculture. How quickly the agricultural occupation of southern Sakhalin has been carried out is indicated by two reports: in 1949 there were 33 kolkhoz there and 3 sovkhos, and in 1950 there were already 69 collective farms.

The progressive mechanization and technicalization of agriculture constitutes a second important part of the content of the more recent reports. The number of Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) has increased in all regions. In the Buryat Mongol ASSR their number increased from 25 in 1937 to 36 in 1948; in Khabarovsk Krai they almost doubled in number from 1938 to 1947, when they numbered 76. In 1948, 25 Grass Mowing Machine Divisions were installed in the Buryat Mongol ASSR; and from 50, 000 hectares of meadowland these Divisions were supposed to supply winter hay for the great kolkhoz, since the manual work force was not sufficient. In the Buryat Mongol ASSR the first agrarian city in the Soviet Far East was also established in 1950, and for this 400 two-story dwellings and 30 one-family houses were constructed. Remarkable, too, are the reports that special mowing threshers were used in harvesting the soy beans and the rice.

Among the plants whose cultivation has been especially fostered, soy beans and rice stand in first place. In 1949 there were 16, 000 more tons of soy beans harvested than in 1948. With rice cultivation, on the other hand, progress seems to be made only slowly. In 1937 in the Far East 36, 400 hectares were cultivated with rice, and, according to the last Five Year Plan, the area is to be increased to 37, 000 hectares by 1950; this is very modest considering the fact that in 1913 there were 57, 000 hectares of rice fields. Great attention is also devoted